Seven Last Words of Christ

“I Thirst”

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John Updike, I think, sometimes understands us better than we understand ourselves. He keeps reminding us that we are bodies, not disembodied spirits confined for 70 or 80 or 90 years — but carnal, physical bodies with all their annoying urges and desires and needs. In a striking poem on resurrection, “Seven Stanzas at Easter,” he says “Let us not mock God with metaphor.”

And so, he would urge us. This is not a metaphor. This is a man dying, experiencing what happens in dying, namely desperate thirst. In the hospice unit the most compassionate thing anyone can do is provide a drink, even ice chips, to parched lips.

The crucifixion of Jesus brings us to the deep mystery of incarnation: God in the flesh, our flesh, our humanity, our needs, our thirst. We've been thinking about that for 2,000 years, writing learned tomes about it, arguing about it, sometimes fighting over it, always finding it easier to affirm his divinity than his humanity. And here, he brings us to the critical point "I'm thirsty . . . I need a drink." Here is the mystery of God coming to us, to be born as we are

born, to grow and become and live like us. To be anxious and afraid like us, to ask God to take this cup from him, as we ask. Here is the mystery of God coming to die with us, and for us.

This is no fancy literary device. And yet the idea of thirst, in addition to describing something so elemental about us that we literally cannot live very long without drinking, also points to something deeply authentic in us.

"O God, you are my God, I seek you,
my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water" the Psalmist wrote (63).

He would have known those words, memorized them as a child — the poetry of his people:

“The Lord is my shepherd.”

“My God, why have you forsaken me?”

“My soul thirsts for you.”

When her partner of 40 years died, Mary Oliver wrote a volume of poems and called it *Thirst*:

“Another morning and I wake with thirst for the goodness I do not have.”

So, dying, Jesus reminds us who we are — all of us, each of us.

Physical creatures, yet thirsty for God, for meaning, for hope, for love.

“Thou hast made us for thyself and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee” Augustine confessed.

And so do I, do we — thirst for God, thirst for him who promised —
“Whoever believes in me will never thirst.”

We are invited to come — to him — and to bring with us our thirst — which only he can quench.